



EASTERN ALEUTIAN TRIBES

3380 C Street, Suite 100
Anchorage, AK 99503

(907) 277-1440 ♦ Fax: (907) 277-1446
www.EATribes.org

March 14, 2017

RE: Support for HJR 14 to increase the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) Rural Health Care Universal Service Support Budget

Dear Representative Bryce Edgmon;

Eastern Aleutian Tribes (EAT) supports HJR 14, an increase to the Federal Communications commission (FCC) Rural Health Care Universal Service Support Budget in order to ensure Alaska can continue to expand access to affordable broadband telehealth service in remote communities.

EAT is a non-profit organization in Alaska's Aleutian Islands, a region that covers an approximately 100,000 square miles, an area slightly larger than Virginia, Kentucky, and Maryland combined. The Aleutian Islands is vast, remote and has frequent inclement weather, making healthcare service a challenge.

The Rural Health Care Universal Services support program enables healthcare providers in the most remote communities of Alaska to offer telehealth services that dramatically improves access to care. These services can expand locally available treatment options, accelerate diagnosis and treatment, and help in avoiding unnecessary travel for care. Also our telehealth system has enabled EAT to provide local availability of behavioral health care (mental and substance abuse services), which has grown significantly in recent years.

The support budget that makes this possible has been capped at the same level since it was established in 1997. For most of its existence, the budget's \$400 million cap has been adequate to meet the demands of the programs. However, following two decades of advances in technology, increases in demand, and the effects of inflations, the FCC expects that in 2017 demand may exceed the cap for the first time.

The State of Alaska has no funding obligations to the Rural Health Care Universal Service Support fund. The entirety of the program is funded through Universal Service charges.

HJR 14 urges the FCC to increase the Rural Health Care Universal Service Support Budget sufficiently to adjust for inflation, advances in technology and the services available with increased broadband, and the increase in demand for broadband-based services. Additionally, the resolution encourages the FCC to index the program budget for inflation and provide for any unused funds to be carried forward to the future funding years. In doing so, the FCC will allow Alaska healthcare providers to continue improving access to care in the most remote

Working Together to Promote Healthy Communities

Adak ♦ Akutan ♦ Cold Bay ♦ False Pass ♦ King Cove ♦ Nelson Lagoon ♦ Sand Point ♦ Whittier

parts of the state.

I appreciate this opportunity to share how important affordable broadband telehealth service is to us. Without the financial assistance that EAT receives from FCC, we would be unable to provide telehealth services, which would dramatically increase the travel costs in our region. Unfortunately, not all patients have access to travel assistance provided by Medicaid or the Alaska Tribal Health Compact, so they would do without higher levels of health care that we cannot provide directly in our clinics, which would dramatically decrease their quality of health. If you have any further questions, please contact me at 907-564-2510 (direct), 1-866-328-4911 (within Alaska), or JenniferH@EATribes.net.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Harrison
CEO

Cc:
Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary Federal communications Commission
Senator Lisa Murkowski
Senator Dan Sullivan
Congressman Don Young
EAT Board of Directors